

that the key to the internal structure and development of Imperial Germany was to be found.<sup>11</sup>

It was here too that the new role of the historical profession could be carved out: in helping people to understand the need for formal democratic institutions to be underpinned by a genuine democratisation of society,<sup>12</sup> as they had not been in the Weimar Republic. This need was dramatically revealed by the political crisis of the West German state in 1967–70, with neo-Nazism gaining ground in the elections and a massive student revolt taking place against traditionalist authoritarianism in the German University, a revolt with many features of which the younger generation of historians, as young lecturers or postgraduate students, undoubtedly sympathised. Not surprisingly, therefore, an element of 'New Left' Marxism was also added to the conceptual armoury of these younger historians, through the influence of philosophers and sociologists such as Jürgen Habermas. It informed their approach to problems such as the legitimisation of rule by oppressive or undemocratic groups in society. But these elements of Marxism were harnessed, as we shall see, to a concentration on the responsibility of pre-industrial élites for the misfortunes of Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that was fundamentally alien to the main emphasis of more consistently Marxist work on the role of the capitalist system and big business in the origins of the First World War and the rise of fascism.

The reason for this peculiar slant given to Marxist concepts by the new German historiography lies in the fact that the general reorientation of German historiography of which it was in part was really a reflection of a seismic shift taking place in West German society as a whole, from the era of reconstruction under Adenauer in the 1950s to the period of stability and maturity that the Federal Republic has been enjoying under the Social Democratic-liberal coalition governments of the 1970s. A major aspect of this shift has been the recognition of the existence of East Germany as a separate state; and the process of self-definition which this involved for West Germans also left its mark on the younger generation of West German historians, who had to come to terms with East German historiography as well as with the interpretations evolved by their own predecessors.<sup>13</sup> The explicit role played by Marxist-Leninist theory in East German history books provided an example to West German historians, helping to provoke them into giving theory a similar role in their own work. But it has also been a deterrent, forcing them — unlike their radical contemporaries in Britain and America — to give Marxist ideas a strictly

# Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany

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Edited by RICHARD J. EVANS



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABDF	Archiv des Bundes Deutscher Frauenvereine (Deutsches Zentralinstitut für Soziale Fragen, Berlin-Dahlem)
AEG	Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft
AFA	Allgemeiner Freier Angestelltenbund
AStAM	Allgemeines Staatsarchiv München (Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Allgemeine Abteilung)
BA	Bundesarchiv (Koblenz)
BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Freiburg)
Bg	Bamberg
BDF	Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine
BdL	Bund der Landwirte
DMV	Deutscher Metallarbeiterverband
DMZ	Deutsche Metallarbeiterzeitung
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
FAH	Familien-Archiv Hülse (Krupp)
Gedag	Gesamtverband deutscher Angestelltengewerkschaften
GHH	Historisches Archiv der Gutehoffnungshütte
GLA	Badisches Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe
GStA	Geheimes Staatsarchiv (Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München, Geheime Abteilung)
HA	Historisches Archiv (der Stadt Köln)
Hbg	Hamburg
HLA	Helene-Lange-Archiv (Deutsches Zentralinstitut für Soziale Fragen, Berlin-Dahlem)
HStA	Hauptstaatsarchiv
IGBE	Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau und Energie (Bergbau-Archiv, Bochum)
INO	Imperial Navy Office
IZF	Institut für Zeitungsforschung (Dortmund)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
LB	Landesbibliothek
MIIn	Ministerium des Innern
Nbg	Neuburg
PA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Bonn
RMA	Reichsmarineamt
RT	Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags

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SA	Stadtarchiv
SAA	Stadtarchiv Augsburg
SAB	Stadtarchiv Bochum (Acta des Königlichen Landrathsamtes)
SAN	Stadtarchiv Nürnberg
SPD	Socialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
StA	Staatsarchiv
StAA	Staatsarchiv Amberg
StA Bg	Staatsarchiv Bamberg
StA Hbg	Staatsarchiv Hamburg
StAL	Staatsarchiv Landshut
StAM	Staatsarchiv München
StAN	Staatsarchiv Nürnberg
StA Nbg	Staatsarchiv Neuburg
StAW	Staatsarchiv Würzburg
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
VdKdAbg	Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen der bayerischen Kammer der Abgeordneten
WA	Werkarchiv (Krupp)
WWA	Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv (Dortmund)
ZSA	Zentrales Staatsarchiv

# 1 INTRODUCTION: WILHELM II'S GERMANY AND THE HISTORIANS

Richard J. Evans

## I

The ten original essays collected in this book have all been specially written for the occasion and are published here for the first time. The authors are all British historians of the younger generation.<sup>1</sup> It is hoped that the contributions in this volume will give some indication of the wealth and diversity of scholarly research now being carried out in Britain on the history of Germany between 1888 and 1918. All the authors have worked extensively on primary sources in German archives. Their essays make use of unpublished documentary material in East and West Germany to cast new light on many aspects of Wilhelmine politics and society, both familiar and unfamiliar. The contributions are arranged by topic along a political continuum starting with problems of government and moving from the right wing through political movements in the middle – peasant populism, political Catholicism, liberalism – to Trade Unionism and Social Democracy, ending with a study of militancy and revolution on the far left. Alternatively, the sequence of essays can be viewed in terms of a descent down the social scale, beginning with the Kaiser and the Chancellor and progressing through the industrialists, administrators and intelligentsia via the urban and rural petty-bourgeoisie to the workers on the shop-floor and down the mines, taking in other social groups such as women and youth *en route*. In this way, the book as a whole tries to give the reader some impression of the range of political opinions and social groups which existed in the German Empire between the end of the 1880s and the beginning of the 1920s.

It is, of course, in no way fortuitous that so many younger historians in Britain – and there are others besides the contributors to this book<sup>2</sup> – are now working on the history of Wilhelmine Germany. For in little over a decade, since the middle of the 1960s, the study of German history between 1888 and 1918 has undergone a profound revolution which has made it now one of the most exciting of all historical areas to be working in. The revolution was set off by the publication in 1961 of Fritz Fischer's book *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (published in English in 1967 as *Germany's Aims in the First World*



War). Fischer's book brought a mass of documentary evidence to light on the vast range and extent of German war aims in 1914–18. The most controversial part of the book was its claim that Germany had not only sought to annex much of Europe and dominate the rest *during* the war, but that this had also been the intention of Wilhelm II and his advisers for some time *before* 1914 as well; indeed, they had deliberately launched the war in order to achieve this. Outside Germany these arguments had been familiar to historians for some time. But within the West German historical profession itself they were regarded as little better than treachery to the national cause. Moreover, some of the implications of Fischer's work were even more disturbing. If Wilhelm II's Germany deliberately launched a war of European conquest, then Hitler's 'Third Reich' was perhaps not such a unique phenomenon as German historians had previously professed to believe. It was scarcely surprising, therefore, that Fischer's book aroused a storm of controversy within the German historical profession, particularly since it appeared at a time when the West German Federal Republic was trying hard to establish its credentials as a democratic and peaceful country before a sceptical and mistrustful international audience.<sup>3</sup>

The so-called 'Fischer controversy' was argued out largely within the confines of traditional methods of diplomatic history, with historians hurling newly-discovered documents at one another in support of rival theses, and doing their best to discredit the reliability of the documentation presented by their opponents or to dispute the construction which they put on them. As the controversy subsided, however, it had already become apparent to German historians younger than the chief participants in the debate (nearly all of whom, including Fischer himself, were in their fifties or sixties, and a few of whom, including Fischer's main critic, Gerhard Ritter, were even older) that these methods were of limited value in solving the profounder questions at issue. Moreover, as it became clear that Fischer's main points – the large measure of responsibility of Germany for the outbreak of World War I and the far-reaching aims pursued by Germany during the war – had been substantiated beyond all reasonable doubt, several other implications emerged to strengthen this sense of methodological dissatisfaction among the younger West German historians.<sup>4</sup>

In the first place, if there really were some similarities between Hitler's foreign policy and that of Wilhelm II, then might there not also be some similarities in the *internal* political structure of Germany under Hitler and under the last Kaiser?<sup>5</sup> Indeed, could not some of the longer-term origins of the Third Reich – origins whose existence

the older generation of historians had largely denied, ascribing the rise of Nazism solely to the demonic genius of Hitler<sup>6</sup> — lie precisely in developments that took place in Wilhelmine or even Bismarckian Germany? Furthermore, if Germany really did launch the First World War, then must there not have been powerful internal social and economic influences prompting her to do so — influences more profound than the mere incompetence of her diplomacy or the blinkered technical rigidity of her military men?<sup>7</sup> Finally, if it was admitted that Nazism had fairly deep roots in German history, and that the German government had borne the major responsibility for the terrible carnage of the First World War, what implications did this have for the role of historical study in Germany? Clearly the historical profession could no longer go on performing the role it had acquired during the nationalist era of the mid-nineteenth century and retained right up to the 1960s — that of helping Germans acquire a national identity through giving them a sense of pride in their past. At the end of the 1960s, therefore, West German historians found themselves searching for a new role.<sup>8</sup>

These considerations led the younger generation of West German historians to a radical break with the traditions of German historiography as they had been developed by the great historians of the past, from Ranke to Meinecke; and it is this, rather than the Fischer controversy itself, which constituted the real revolution in German historiography. Traditional German historical writing placed the State at the centre of the historical stage, and argued that its major policies were dictated by its position in the world of nation states.<sup>9</sup> The younger generation turned this thesis of the so-called 'primacy of foreign policy' (*Primat der Aussenpolitik*) on its head and argued instead for the 'primacy of internal policy' (*Primat der Innenpolitik*) in determining matters of war and peace. As they turned their attention in the wake of the Fischer controversy to the internal politics of Bismarckian and Wilhelmine Germany, they began to take a much more critical view of the German Empire than their predecessors had done. In this process of reassessment, the younger German historians began to discover neglected radical predecessors who had taken a similarly critical view in previous decades (and had been cold-shouldered by the historical profession for precisely this reason) — most notably, perhaps, Eckart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg.<sup>10</sup> More important still, they also began to reach out to the social sciences for new concepts and methods with which to make sense of the new past they were discovering: it was in social history, as they came to believe,

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